

Dr Strange and the Lost Apprentice

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Summary: On the hellish Planes of Pohldark, Dr Strangece faces the abandoned demon army of Dormammu-the Unending Horde, but an enigmatic stranger already engages them in battle. Is the enemy of his enemy his friend and when he claims to be apprentice to the Ancient One is it even possible? Can Dr Strange defeat an army and solve a mystery to protect the honor of his master?

Dr Strange and the Lost Apprentice

**** Dr. Strange encounters the Lost Apprentice****

The library of the Sanctum Sanctorum, home of Dr Strange Sorcerer Supreme and Wong, his friend and former apprentice, standing by watching as he steps through the event horizon of an awaiting portal.

"Vishanti be with you." Wong bids.

Inside the undulating portal, pass the shifting regions, random energies and formless shapes which inhabit the void.

"Thank you my friend, if only luck were one of my powers" he thinks.

Traversing the infinite landscape, his eyes follow the horizon, a single distant point.

"Only uneasy feelings ever accompany me to this inhospitable place, coincidentally on this rare occasion when the Orb of Agamotto directs me into harm's way unknowing exactly what is to be encountered."

Upon reaching his destination he motions a hand gesture that causes the pinhole horizon to expand and the portal walls to fluidly rescind as he exits the magical segue through space/time and onto the Planes of Pohldark. Surveying the barren lands, he sees naught but

mountains, fire, smoke and ash.

"I sense only malevolence here...truly the most dire of dimensions."

His nose wrinkles in protest of the harsh environment.

"This atmosphere is almost tactile with air-born hazards and gaseous fumes in congress with the stench of death and decay. It seems to waft throughout these dreary lands-In safety from this toxic wind, come forth the Circles of Seraphim."

The invocation manifests as thousands of tiny bubbles that surround him and merge together, becoming one his protective personal environment. Mystically his senses are alerted so he begins scanning the area and sees it. Across the twilight at the opposite end of the sky a dark cloud looms, moving unnaturally through the air. Pluming in a swift, artificial nature it rolls with a methodical precision...

"Odd...like its thinking."

Closer, he can see it more clearly, discerning its horrifying composition,

"That it is no cloud-Demons!" the Cloak of Levitation flares as his hands pulse with energy.

"They are legion. Thousands...tens-of-thousands!"

Their numbers darken the sky. The demonic horde swells, forming an immense wall before him. The dark magic beasts surge, charging directly at him. An incantation forms within his thoughts as he raises his arms towards the mass of visceral, clawed appendages and drooling maws bearing down on him. Hands positioned, a blunt force impacts him from behind knocking him off balance and with his concentration broken, his spell is ended.

"Ikonn's Wrath!" he curses.

Looking around he searches for some understanding and spots the interloper engaging the demons in his stead. A bald, dark skinned man in tattered robes and covered in strange black markings.

"His robes are similar to the monks of Kamar-Taj..." the thought flashes, "But what are those strange markings?"

He wields a polished metal staff adorned with an intricate flaring housing an oblong black crystal, crackling with an opaque energy. Suddenly, large blades simultaneously protrude from opposite sides of the flaring as he raises it above his head propelling himself directly into the assemblage of beasts unleashing it upon them.

"RHAA! Who shall be next to be reduced to glittering atoms and spread upon the wind?"

Again and again he drops his ax into the slew of encroaching beasts, his magically augmented slashes dissecting them with ease. Cutting them down with relentless aggression severing limbs from torsos all

falling away, plummeting to the ground far beneath. He channels powerful mystic blasts and telekinetic force waves into his attacks, reducing their ranks to mulch.

"GRRRAA All Together!" a demon calls out.

"Crush the Quell-er of Hordes!"

Again lifting his ax skyward it becomes a staff once more to which he calls down a bolt of lightning that splits the sky streaking into it. He extends his arm redirecting the bolt at the demonic horde.

"Feel my power from the sky!"

The electricity arcs into dozens of the loathsome creatures, paralyzed with a million volts and then ionized into charred remnants. The crackling power snaps Dr Strange back into the moment.

"Have I really just been floating here watching?"

Emanating with power he leaps into battle.

"Seems I've made an ally. Maybe luck is with my abilities."

Scores of the savage beasts stalk the dark interloper,

"Come forward evil ones. I have already dined upon your beastly brethren and they send their salutations!"

He pulls back his arm and the mark within his palm erupts in Hellfire which he releases in a wide burst upon them, incinerating hundreds as his mystic flames fill the sky. Dr Strange sequestered within the Seven Rings of Raggador is unaffected by the devastating attack and lingering magical fires.

He hovers within a halo of idling demons, slowly rotating, seeing that he is surrounded 360 degrees. Dropping the rings Dr strange again moves toward the epicenter of battle,

"More? Come then! Who shall be next to be reduced to glittering atoms spread upon the wind?!" he rages.

"Is he smiling?"

The dark stranger wipes his chin,

"Yes, gather 'round demon seed, pay o mage to your-FALLEN!"

He lunges with an elongating arm and enlarged fist, reaching twenty feet, striking five demons simultaneously. His arm recoils and he holds out his staff which transforms once again into a battle ax as all standoff in tense silence,

"HAAAAAA!"

All charge into battle. Their copious numbers replenish an encompassing sphere of attackers that obscures him from Dr Strange's line of sight.

"He smites with such fever that they fall at the pace of rain, yet their infinite numbers renew as such, that I cannot catch even the slightest glimpse of him."

Within the eye of the battle his ax cleaves indiscriminately.

"Doomed, weaklings! If your only hope is to drown me in your rushing numbers, you will all soon taste the blessing of my ax!"

Several of the behemoths rush in to overwhelm him, jostling briefly before being forcibly thrown off. Thrust apart by the now twenty foot tall warrior mage, still clutching one of hellish goblins as it struggles in futility. Instantly both are cocooned in torquing eldritch flames, which die out and reveal the helpless beast as a shriveled husk. Mystically stripped of it's life force he tosses it aside. He turns to face the remaining enveloping demons,

"Winds of Watoomb, by my command!" a human voice calls out.

The invocation immobilizes every devil within sight.

"AAAAHHH!" several beasts scream out.

"I can't move!"

"None of us can move!"

A sharp crinkling sounds permeates the area becoming the sickening crunch of air being forced from their bodies and their leathery flesh and appendages wrinkle and fold collapsing their bodies inward upon themselves.

"By the Ancient One!"

Catching up to the battle Dr Strange internalizes what he just heard but quickly buries the thought to capitalize upon his foregone spell, swooping past his new ally, building another attack.

"I shall finish this, hell spawn!"

Mystical energy ebbs en swirling him

"Be it the Darkforce dimension, Hell or Negative Zone, ban-i-shed I sentence via conjurer's cone!"

Hundreds of black tornado-like dimensional rifts manifest breaching the realm, arbitrarily withdrawing anything and everything within proximity of its unforgiving vortex and that is the thousands of demons littering the skies.

"Take heed!" the warrior mage calls, rushing directly at Dr Strange.

He intercepts a vectoring blast of dark magic, maneuvering his staff deflecting it back against its caster with explosive results that scatter the inhuman creatures.

"My thanks stranger!"

"I am called Anoroc...Warrior Mage, Lost apprentice to the Ancient One."

"Well Anoroc, let's see if we can keep this spirit of cooperation going..."

Configuring his hands to spell-casting position,

"To halt this horde of advancing gorgons, I release the Icy Tendrils of Ikthalon!"

The wind increases to hurricane speeds and within seconds the temperature drops below freezing. Torrential arctic winds coat everything in ice and the frozen monsters begin dropping from the sky. Anoroc swings his staff like a bat, creating a 'cascading shear' waves of increasingly destructive magical energy, shattering their icy captives in droves. Then looks to Dr Strange.

The two men hover near one another eventually coming face to face. Peering into each others eyes, mystically analyzing and judging the others moral axis'.

"Who are you?" Anoroc inquires.

"Doctor Strange, Sorcerer Supreme of the Earth's dimension and former apprentice to the Ancient One."

Reacting faster than the eye can follow, Anoroc catches an energy bolt that would have struck Dr Strange and never deviates from their clashing eyes. The energy churns within his palm, pulsating it grows from infusion with his own energies. Turning back toward the crowd of demons he lobs it into their midst,

"To the hell of oblivion beasts!"

He confidently turns back to face Strange before his attack lands, but Dr Strange watches it behind him. The reciprocated volley impacts the demon ilk, discharging a volatile flash that reduces the entire troop of to smoldering ash.

"You were apprenticed to the Ancient One? He lives?!"

"Long story for which I feel we have no time but we will speak of this in the end" Strange promises.

The Apprenticed sons of the Ancient One engage the advancing demonic horde with Anoroc still addressing Dr Strange,

"Yes, we will but hear this Strange. If your words are false concerning my master, after I have dealt with these 'things' then you too will feel my warriors magic" he threatens credibly.

Under a raised eyebrow Dr Strange heads into battle, thinking,

"Experience dictates that I should take him at his word."

Dr Strange produces a powerful emanation amassing his power, `

"The Seven Suns of Cinnubus!" he barks, firing a massive stationary

beam against the demonic legions disintegrating everything in front of him for a thousand yards.

One brute surprises him from above, connecting with a severe blow to the back of his head sending Dr Strange plummeting from the sky. Pleased with himself the evil one grins before exploding in a flurry of innards and appendages, expelled by Anoroc's telekinetic blast wave.

"Strange!" he dives in pursuit.

Evading hundreds of strikes from all directions he navigates the minefield of enemies. Transmuting his staff into a trident he reciprocates gorging, blasting and penetrating his way down to Dr Strange. His elongated arm grasps the barely conscious sorcerer around the waist and pulls him near, as he continues fending off demonic attacks. Dr Strange touches the back of his head and looks at his blood covered palm,

"...little woosey'"

"Strange, the horde is regrouping, are you allâ€"RRRAAAA!"

Anoroc's agony fueled scream unleashes a mystically enhanced sonic-boom. His markings illuminate a brilliant white as an internal conflict overwhelms him causing him to release his grip on Dr Strange. Still bleeding, Dr Strange struggles but reestablishes mental command over the Cloak of Levitation and uses it to keep himself aloft. Anoroc's condition degenerates rapidly and now he is completely disabled. Gritting his teeth through the pain Dr Strange motions,

"The Wand, the Eye their master too, I call upon the Winds of Watoomb!"

With a labored effort he invokes the power of Watoomb, aerokinetically erecting a wind platform supporting his pain racked ally and himself.

"Anoroc, what's happening to you?"

"My ingested...trying...to...gain controlâ€"AAGH!"

Dr Strange sees the amassing horde, pondering his ally's inexplicable episode and the severity of his own injury effecting his ability to wield magic. He realizes that he must make a determination with due haste or lose all opportunity.

"Time to take our leave! By my command Vapors of Valtorr, conceal and remove us from this war!"

The obscuring fog instantly permeates the area around the two men. Demons pursue them rushing into the billowing mists, growling and roaring, they slice blindly at their quarry. Cries ring out as the demons slash other demons and pass completely through the vapors, failing to ever reach their human prey.

Elsewhere.

Within the murky vapors, Dr Strange endures a trial of his patients,

helplessly watching Anoroc shudder with pain, he is unsure if he has succeed in his mission and is severely wounded.

"Intriguing, even among these dense mists I can see the continued glow of his markings quite brightly-"

"AAAGH!"

"Hang on my friend, you will soon have the attention you need."

"I will keep...them"RAAGH...detained.." he stammers before losing consciousness.

The extra-dimensional vapors clear to reveal that the two men have been transported to the inner sanctum of the Sanctum Sanctorum.

A short time later.

Anoroc recovers asleep on the couch with Wong examining his 'markings' under the doctor's watchful eye.

..."My guess would be ritualistic tattoos."

"And he said he had to keep them 'detained', what did he mean?"

"He eluded to 'ingesting' demons, which I hope-for his sake-was a euphemism."

"Do you believe him, I mean about being apprenticed to Master Yao?"

"There is a way for me to-"

"Where...?"

Dr Strange's words are cut short when Anoroc suddenly grips Wong's arm.

"They are my 'battle-marks', they represent my 'ingested'.

"And what exactly did you mean by ingested? Wong probes.

Anoroc looks intently at Wong,

"Who might you be friend?"

A hand grasps Wong's shoulder,

"This is Wong, my former apprentice. Dr Strange interrupts.

Wong looks up at Stephen.

"Wong, would you mind getting our guest some water?"

"Of course Stephen"

Wong rises to his feet and with a slight bow he turns and exits the room as Dr Strange steps closer,

"You were telling me about your 'battle-marks'?"

"-NNG, they are the result of assimilating the essence of another being. Mine are from over two dozenâ€”HRRRâ€”I needed for..."

"I feared as much. What the hell did you think you were doing?!"

"I would haveâ€”NNG...perished on thatâ€”AAAAGH!"

Dr Strange stands, erecting his hands in the fourth position,

"My amulet will decipher this internal affliction."

His eyes close and the room darkens. The Eye of Agamotto opens releasing its golden emanations simultaneously projecting the incorporeal 'third eye' upon the forehead of Dr Strange. The golden hue extends out, over Anoroc, ceasing his convulsions and relaxing his body,

"Nothing is beyond the eye of the all-seeing."

The eye traverses vast metaphysical terrains, probing memories and mental images, seeing all of time throughout the life of Anoroc, bequeathing comprehension of the perceptions onto Dr Strange.

"All that time on Pohldark...you've endured...suffered...I am sorry my friend."

"Strange...you must believe me...I had no-"

"The eye is vision omniscient, I understand."

The Master of the Mystic Arts searches within Anoroc's soul, transcending darkness and light, through the veil of life.

"Oshtur's eyes, they are within you! Thirty dark essences'...but from creatures that do not have spirits. You've somehow mystically torn their consciousness' from their bodies and detained them within your very own life force. I see them climbing, clawing, scratching their way over one another, trying to flee from perdition within you."

"The ritual destroys the body...they can never return toâ€”AAAAA!"

He studies the pit of confined unnatural spirits, yearning under perpetual agony for their physical bodies.

"They fight for throne...control of your mortal form. Control would equal free will as well as access and control of all the others powers-A light..."

In the real world a light grows from Anoroc's 'battle-marks'

"rrrRRRAAAH!"

Wong returns to the room, quickly shielding his eyes against the blazing intensity. Undeterred, Dr Strange peers deeper, ignoring the light he tries to quantify the depths of their peril in his crusade for Anoroc's soul. Wong holds his hands in front of his eyes unable

Anoroc's eyes snapped shut, gritting his teeth, Wong tries to hold

him down,

"I cannot redact the the amulets probe!"

Light emissions from Anoroc's battle-marks instantly ramp up, blinding Wong and expelling the Sorcerer Supreme from the metaphysical realm. Anoroc erupts with power rising to his feet, simultaneously throwing Dr Strange and Wong to the floor. Two feet taller than before his mass increases and his teeth become serrated growing too large for his mouth. A tail and claws extend as his skin calcifies to a scaly texture in a patchwork not fully manifested,

"I am FFFFFFFE! Ha-Ha-Ha! Sorcerer fool, however I must thank you for your assistance now- DIEEEEE!"

Hellfire swirls from 'demonic' Anoroc's mouth and eyes just before he unleashing, explosively filling the room.

"Shields of Seraphim!" Dr Strange calls forth.

Wong, closer to the blast and outside the protective reach of Dr Strange's barrier is struck down.

"No, Wong!"

Fearing for his companion divides his concentration and in that moment he is overcome by the pulverizing eldritch flames.

Later, in the obliterated study and inner Sanctum.

Dr Strange comes to, recalling recent events. He looks around his destroyed Inner Sanctum and sees Wong, deshoveled, trying to recover.

"Stephen...he's gone."

"Never mind him right now, "

Dr Strange stands, raising both hands in front of him, a few inches away with his palms facing in. He moves them down the length of his body magically wiping away his wounds and mending his torn clothing. Afterwards he makes his way over to Wong, helping him stand he casts the same quick spell undoing his injuries.

"How do you feel, friend?"

"I will get better, thank you. You do know that I was able to shield myself?"

"That is why I had called your name, in pride"

"Right, ...I can use telepathy too, Stephen."

"But you could never get passed my defenses."

Wong's face turns very sour,

"Oh really?!"

Standing poised, Dr Strange focuses his thoughts manifesting a

strobing flash that envelopes him within a magenta hued energy field.

"You are like my brother Wong but am I not 'Master of the Mystic Arts?'"

Dr Strange grips his cloak and rises to the ceiling, exiting the embossed sunlight to the outside where he ascends high above the city. Tapping the ambient magical forces of the universe he becomes mystically aware, sensing the presence of the evil anomaly. He streaks through the night sky in pursuit, quickly arriving at the unmistakable path of destruction. Cries of chaos from panicked civilians seem to come from all directions, accompanied by the chorus of blaring car alarms with every building and street light flickering erratically.

"I am accountable for this..." thinking, unnerved by the remarkable horror, "perhaps I am fool."

He follows the destruction of entire blocks razed to desolation with collapsed buildings and crushed vehicles and untold millions in property damages.

"Such havoc! It is mystifying that I have yet to discover anyone who could have cried out prior. Some of these buildings have entire sections torn away from the foundation some structure remaining yet not one person in need of help. I sense...nothing. I sense..."

The ethereal glimmer of swirling lights fade as Dr Strange materializes on the sidewalk, investigating a powerful sensation. Levitating a street sign and some debris away he eventually finds clothing. A man's shirt and pants along with a woman's dress, hovering mid-air in front of him, revealing the true horror still on the ground,

"Spirit of the Ancient One...skin...! It was the atrocity of death I felt!"

His eyes close as he lowers his head and stands in silence. The clothing falls atop the rubble and he leaps into the sky.

"NO MORE!"

Air and earth quake under his booming voice of uncharacteristic rage.

"There was the chance that we could have been allies, possibly even master and apprentice but this, I will not abide! Sworn to my master, now one with eternity, you will be dead before anymore innocent blood is s-"

Robbed of the breath needed to finish his words, squeezed from within in him by the 'Pincers of Power.' Demonic Anoroc holds him up, pulling him close to his gigantic face and gusts of beastly breath.

"Host of Hoggoth!" Dr Strange futility raises his hands against the giant's offensive breath.

"Hoggoth? Ha-Ha-Ha, That vermin couldn't cleanse my aura."

The monster unleashes the concussive of darkforce energy from his mouth and eyes upon Dr Strange, seeking protection behind his hastily erected a barrier that begins to crumble almost immediately.

"Foolish mortal, this vessel told you of your pathetic shared master and now his knowledge will be your undoing-Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha!"

Under the strain of the Anoroc's darkforce assault, Dr Strange intensifies his focus.

"HRRRAAAAA!" his concentrated effort reinforces the barrier and stops it from crumbling.

The distended field grows with his endeavor and increases in size until it shatters the pincers restraining him. With no loss of power or motion he reforms his defensive barrier into his own powerful offensive, pushing back against the sustained blast from his adversary. Their intersecting magical offensives collide mid-air in a dynamic salvo and the hell-beast feels himself losing ground,

"NO-RRAAAGH!"

Reasserting himself, he increases his effort, releasing a blistering cascade of darkforce energy using his full power. The cataclysmic energies clap with the deafening sound of a thunder.

"You are powerful abominable one, but here I AM SORCERER SUPREME!"

Dr Strange extends his hand in first position enveloped within rippling red and amber energies.

"W-W-W-W-W-W-WABOOOOOMMM!"

The resounding power surge detonates in a sonic boom blasting the thirty foot leviathan back between two previously destroyed buildings. Dr Strange drifts through the air above him.

"You encroach upon my dimension, rampage in havoc spreading fear and murdering innocents- hear me now hellish fiendâ€"your carnage ends here NOW!"

"This body is mine, mortal dog as well as this dimension now and I will enjoy killing you to keep them!"

The creature's tail slithers beneath him and in the corner of his eye Dr Strange can see it whipping to strike him. Moving too fast to evade to the evil one's attack it travels right through the 'Master of the Mystic Arts', who has become incorporeal.

"No!"

"Yes monster, SORCERER SUPREME!" he boasts.

The tangible once again mage fires a mystic bolt severing the creature's tail.

"Miscreant, You know my title, I won't say it again, now, The Crimson Bands of Cyttorak will contain your machinations."

A tumultuous swirling mist materializes in the air, rapidly forming into thick crimson bands descending upon the leviathan. Dr Strange almost feels pity watching the colossal beast in a crawling retreat, his defeat burgeoning upon the yoke of bondage, he raises his hands in protest,

"My power is not yet spent mage!"

Destructive bolts of demonic magic blast from his hand and with BLAH from the other, he adds soul-searing hellfire erupting from his mouth and eyes.

"I will be free!"

The aggregated combination of attacks rises towards the unimpressed Dr Strange as the volley dissipates unremarkable, like water crashing a shore.

"Completely ineffectual against the power of Cyttorak, Ironically...while your shackling is inevitable you will be free, goblin. You have inspired me."

The crimson bands ensnare the roaring behemoth, spitting and cursing Dr Strange.

"This is not how it ends mortal. I do not rest and I will return 'white hat.' I will break free from this suffocating shell and drag you into-"

A finger snap ends the titans diatribe, conjuring an additional band covering his entire head.

Later, in The Sanctum Sanctorum.

Blackness parts to blurry splotches of color and indiscernible sounds but his focus comes quickly and Anoroc takes in his surroundings, seeing Dr Strange levitating behind the Orb of Agamotto, eyes closed in meditation. Wong enters the magically reset study carrying a tray of towels and other provisions.

"Welcome back, friend. How do you feel?"

"Many things reside within me, as far as feeling, shame is currently the most prevalent"

Wong places the tray on to a table at the foot of the sofa. Anoroc sits up, removing the blanket covering him, before looking to Strange,

"When one of my 'ingested' gains control there is no luxury of ignorance for me to my coerced actions. I am here...inside, spectator to my own actions, trying to regain control of my body and I remember everything.

Wong watches the two men stare each other into awkward silence.

"I'll take your lack of admonishment as empathy. I also remember trying to explain, before my episode, that I was only an apprentice when my master and I went to Pohldark. I feared for my life, that I would not survive. I awaited my masters return so long the time I could not measure."

"Almost 300 years." Wong chimes in.

"Wong!" Dr Strange admonishes. "Please forgive him, he has the defense mechanisms of a child."

A sharply pointed brow over a stone gaze, silently admonishes Wong, emoting a shamed puppy dog expression. Anoroc looks at Wong and then to Dr Strange.

"You were on Pohldark for two hundred eighty-six years and I had planned to share that with you a bit more tactfully, my apologies, but Wong has the defense mechanisms of a child."

Anoroc pulls his staff to his chest. Closing his eyes he slightly lowers his head,

"In a battle with the Dreaded Dormammu, when my master and I pursued him onto the Planes of Pohldarkâ€"NNNG!" planting his staff for balance he grips it tightly doubled over.

Wincing and gritting his teeth strikes fear into Wong looking to Dr. Strange holding a hand up in first position.

"Try to continue" he urges their new ally.

"His demonic army-'The Unending Horde' accosted me with their numbers advantage. Dormammu gained the advantage, vanquishing the Ancient One-to I know not where and when he did not return for me I feared him dead and still I had to fight on against their incalculable numbers. My powers; finite. My apprenticeship; unfulfilled and a great deal of time had passed and I grew weaker. I needed sustenance. To supplement my strength I took my only option...and I looked to my enemy."

Wong and Dr Strange look to one another, both coming to uneasy feelings hearing the path of the afflicted man's words.

"I attempted the Battle Magic Assimilation-"

"Uh-Oh..." Wong quips.

Dr Strange raises his hand, signaling Wong to slow down both verbally and enthusiastically.

"It is an ancient ritual which destroys the physical form of the sacrificed as you simultaneously absorbing their newly freed spiritual essence."

"Including some of their attributes, powers and abilities." Dr Strange assumes.

"that would allow you access to demonic magic without technically succumbing to the caveats of delving into use of dark energies, resourceful." adds Wong.

"And difficult, Anoroc continues.

"And unbelievably dangerous!" Stephen notes angrily.

"Indeed, taking several attempts before I succeeded, the only concerning danger was the continued fighting I had to do fending off the horde."

Strange glides across the room, passing Wong and Anoroc and arriving at the end table where he telekinetically prepares some tea.

"You were extremely fortunate with the myriad of possibilities to potential outcomes, most of which unfavorable, should not have been attempted with nominal experience. Thank the Vishanti you had not fallen victim to even greater consequence."

"You mean like; taking demonic form, rampaging through the city and draining innocent people of their--"

"Wong!" Dr Strange interrupts.

"I know Stephen, too blunt but you said yourself--'he must know what he has done'--."

Strange turns his attention back to his Anoroc, standing face to face with him,

"Do not seek to judge me, Strange. Yes, there was consequence. Yes, I understood and yes, I was prepared to accept them, any and all. I was fighting a war! An apprentice...alone so spare me your condescension and lectures. "

Anoroc looks himself over, noticing that absence of the majority of his battle-marks. Unhanding his staff he looks into the grand mirror on the wall, seeing that they are only on his left side. His of his chest, neck and face, all with just one mark and only five more down his left arm and into his hand.

"I did not believe this possible, my...battle-marks...they're gone."

"An exorcism performed by Wong and myself, allowed me vanquished the majority of your ingested. Absorbing that many powerful essences' made you comparable to a nuclear reactor amount of demonic essences would only have become more difficult to maintain, increasing the frequency of your 'episodes' bringing you closer to critical mass and a meltdown would be a cataclysmic event of unknowing proportions. Sadly your very soul is codicil with the remaining. There are still eight of them left, bonded to you now and forever more condensed yet more potent and you must be diligent at becoming more adept in your meditative practices."

Anoroc looks back, over his shoulder at Dr Strange.

"I do not judge your actions having to deal with the Unending Horde, in that place I only wish to convey the gravity of choice and consequence."

"It is you who is wrong, Strange" Anoroc interjects. "You have seen

an episode of my losing control over my 'ingested' I stand here alive feeling better than I could have claimed for some time."

Dr Strange appears to grow in size as the room darkens around him, his voice like a trumpet,

"Yes you are alive and with that privilege you are never allowed to forget the innocent lives you that are not here, alive! Lives you have cost, so please continue to feel better, but do not confuse this adulation with exoneration! Your soul is embedded with the evil essence' of creatures from hell which may also be your fate and you will be given no leeway in my demands for your atonement!

Anoroc reaches aside, recalling his staff, he grips it with both hands as his eyes flash with power. Wong stands anxiously frozen at the precipice of the study,

"I remember Strange and I understand that I have attained many debts, most of which to you."

"Then understand that I brought you back to Earth and as the mystical guardian of this dimension, you and all you do going forth I am accountable for."

"I hear your words and respect your position as the Sorcerer Supreme but I will be responsible for my own actions..."

Anoroc lays his staff at the feet of Dr Strange and bends to one knee.

"As your faithful apprentice, if you will have me?

Dr Strange places his hand upon the head of his kneeling new apprentice and with Wong looking on silence fills the room. The future is uncertain but for a master and apprentice it is but another undertaking for knowledge of the universe.

****THE END****

End
file.